

West German Hostage Update - 28 July 1987

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Bonn Paving Way for Release of German Hostage?

We continue to believe that circumstances appear favorable for the release of one of the two West German hostages in Lebanon as the result of an "agreement" between Bonn, Damascus, Tehran, and intermediaries to the Lebanese Shi'a hostage holders. Nonetheless, the parties--especially West Germany and the hostage holders--are susceptible to cold feet.

- In new developments, Bonn has sent a Foreign Ministry official, Wolfgang Guertelmann, as a special envoy for a three-week official mission to Beirut, according to West German and Lebanese press reports. He told reporters his mission is to study the situation and to make contacts regarding the hostage situation.
- Chancellery Chief Wolfgang Schaeuble told Ambassador Burt on 22 July that Social Democrat Middle East expert Hans-Juergen Wischnewski "had gotten nowhere" in his meetings with Iranian government intermediary Sadiq Tabatabai. He also denied a West German magazine report that it was a "foregone conclusion" that the Hesse state minister-president would pardon suspected TWA 847 hijacker Mohammad Ali Hammadi, if convicted, and open the way for an exchange of Hammadi for West German hostages Rudolf Cordes and Alfred Schmidt.

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Efforts are also continuing--albeit at a smaller scale--to improve relations with Syria.

-- A West German newsmagazine has reported that Bonn has abrogated the expulsion order against Tabatabai which resulted from his 1985 arrest in West Germany for drug smuggling.

-- Following on West German efforts to make last week's UN Security Council resolution on the Gulf War more palatable to Iran, Foreign Minister Genscher blamed Iraq for starting the war and accused it of having used chemical weapons in a radio interview after the visit to Bonn of Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati. Although the West German foreign ministry later denied that Genscher was assessing "responsibility for the war," the UN actions and Genscher's statement have led to a chill in West Germany's relations with Iraq.

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Although Velayati's most recent promises of Iranian "good offices" and efforts to secure the release of the West Germans on humanitarian grounds appeared somewhat stronger than previous assurances from lower officials, Iran's degree of control over the holders of the West German hostages is not known.

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-- Short of a direct, immediate two-for-two exchange of the West Germans for the imprisoned Hammadi brothers--to which we believe Bonn would not agree--the hostage holders probably fear West German "duplicity," such as occurred in the "deal" with Paris in the trial of Lebanese terrorist Georges Ibrahim Abdallah.

-- Following last week's Air Afrique skyjacking, in which press reports indicate the Lebanese terrorist included the release of the Hammadis in his demands, the Kohl government may be less sanguine to conclude any sort of arrangement which requires trusting the hostage holders to live up to their part of a "bargain."

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